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Type, Image & the Art of Protest

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Art and Design

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree:

Master of Fine Arts in Graphic Design

by

Wendy Blair

December 2004

Professor Wayne Dyer, Chair

Dr. Peter H. Pawlowicz

Professor Don Davis

Keywords: Graphic Design, Social Protest Art, Social Protest, Art, Conceptual, War

Type, Image & the Art of Protest

by
Wendy Blair

This thesis is the culmination of my work as a graphic artist thus far. I chose to investigate the use of type and image in the production of social protest art as it relates to historical and contemporary art as well as my own. Methods used in gathering the data include references from books, periodicals, websites, and hands-on application of the artistic process. Conclusions found within this paper suggest that using type and image within a multimedia process serves to communicate important messages and attempts to educate the viewer on important political and social matters. Protest art has and will continue to be a viable and important form of art. This thesis is significant in presenting my artwork as it fits into the mosaic of protest art in the past along with discussion of design elements and graphic processes.

DEDICATION

To the misguided souls who don't vote, in hopes that it will inspire you to do so
responsibly...

And also...

To my daughter, Tesha,
Who has always believed in me,
and given me strength and motivation.
To my parents, William and Marcella Ricker,
who always encouraged me as long as they were here.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you:

Professor M. Wayne Dyer, for teaching me everything that you have.

Professor Ralph Slatton, for your sense of humor and understanding.

Dr. Peter H. Pawlowicz, for your supervision and guidance.

Dr. Vida Hull, for your input and support.

Associate Professor Don Davis, for serving on my committee.

Special thanks to **Spicey Gould**, for your support and editing.

Special thanks to **Tesha Blair** for everything.

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CHAPTER 1

INTENT

The purpose of this paper is to assist and support my thesis exhibition in correspondence with the requirements of the Master of Fine Arts Degree at East Tennessee State University. My body of work mainly focuses on social protest and unrest. Social protest has been creating awareness and changing opinions and convictions of persons since Neoclassical times. In this thesis, I will attempt to review the use of type and image, including photography, and found objects in my artwork for the purpose of educating and creating awareness. I will also discuss how the assemblage of my work comes together to create a piece of social protest. I will also discuss who has influenced my work and how current events relate to and have helped steer the work to bring together a multi design that challenges the viewer with Type, Image, & the Art of Protest.

CHAPTER 2

TYPE

Type: the union of words that carry a symbolic message along with their shape and form that lend themselves to become part of the design.¹

“Our civilization is based on the alphabet and numerals. These elementary marks have no semantic meaning, but have been assigned roles as visual substitutes for speech sounds and arithmetic quantities. Traditionally, the word *typography* meant the technical process of printing words through the use of metal types with raised letterforms that could be inked and printed in a process not entirely unlike a rubber stamp. In our electronic age, typography encompasses the transmission and communication of alphabetical and numerical information through a variety of means, including video transmission, computer display, and electric signs.”² Our society has traditionally used text in a dominant form with images being used to help in the interpretation of the text. These kinds of word-dominant relationships can still be found, but the fast-paced world of the twentieth-century changed the traditional form of message.

In the late sixties and early seventies, there was an explosion of graphic design that included and supported type as the design of the message. The words then became the design. This is evident on the cover of the December, 1973 *Ms. Magazine* where the type becomes the design as well as the message. A red neon sign reads, “Peace on Earth

¹ Author’s definition of type.

² Meggs, Philip B., *Type & Image* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1989) 17.

Good Will to People.” The artist uses the red neon type to draw attention to the piece as the message is relayed.

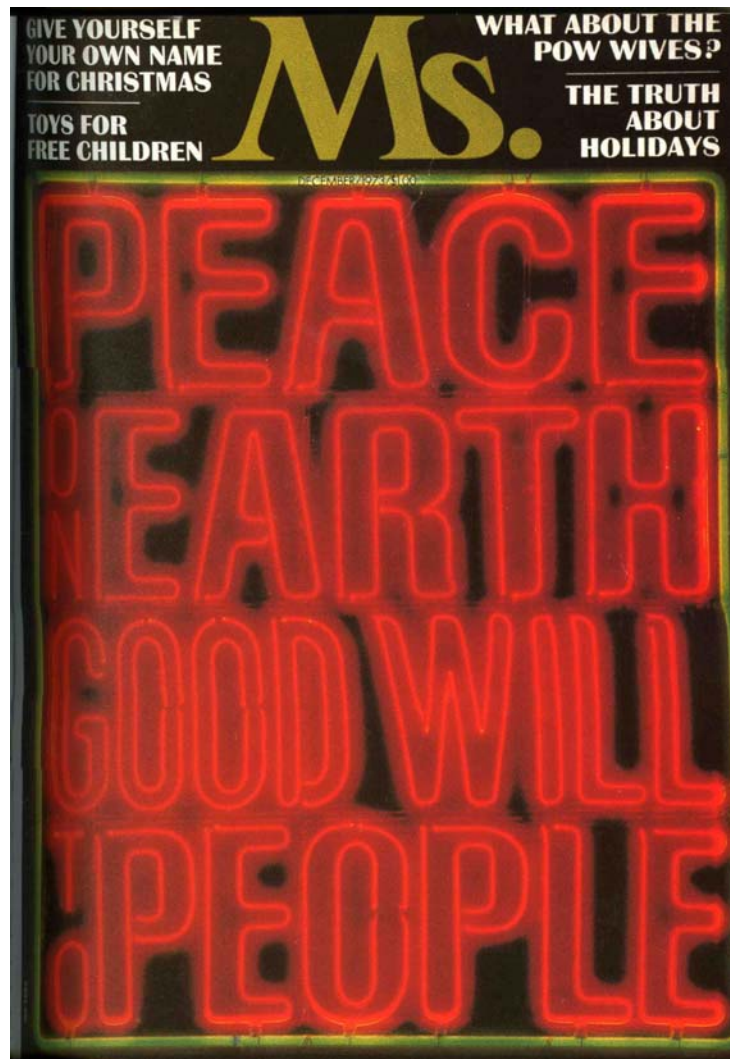


Figure 1.
“Peace on Earth, Good Will to People”³

“Graphic resonance is a borrowed term from music. It means reverberation or echo, a subtle quality of tone or timbre. Graphic designers bring a resonance to visual communication through the interaction of the connotative qualities of type and images and the expressive power of the visual vocabulary that is color, shape, texture, and the

³ As cited in Fichner-Rathus, L (86). Ms. Magazine cover, December, 1973

interrelations between forms in space. Mass communication is given an aesthetic dimension that transcends the dry conveyance of information, intensifies the message, and enriches the experience of the audience.”⁴ Therefore, the organization of graphic space into a cohesive totality is a complex process. I use elements such as type, image, color, and transparency that make way for the message. I am politically motivated by all the injustice that I see in the world, with the hope for change; I am driven to have my artwork become my voice.

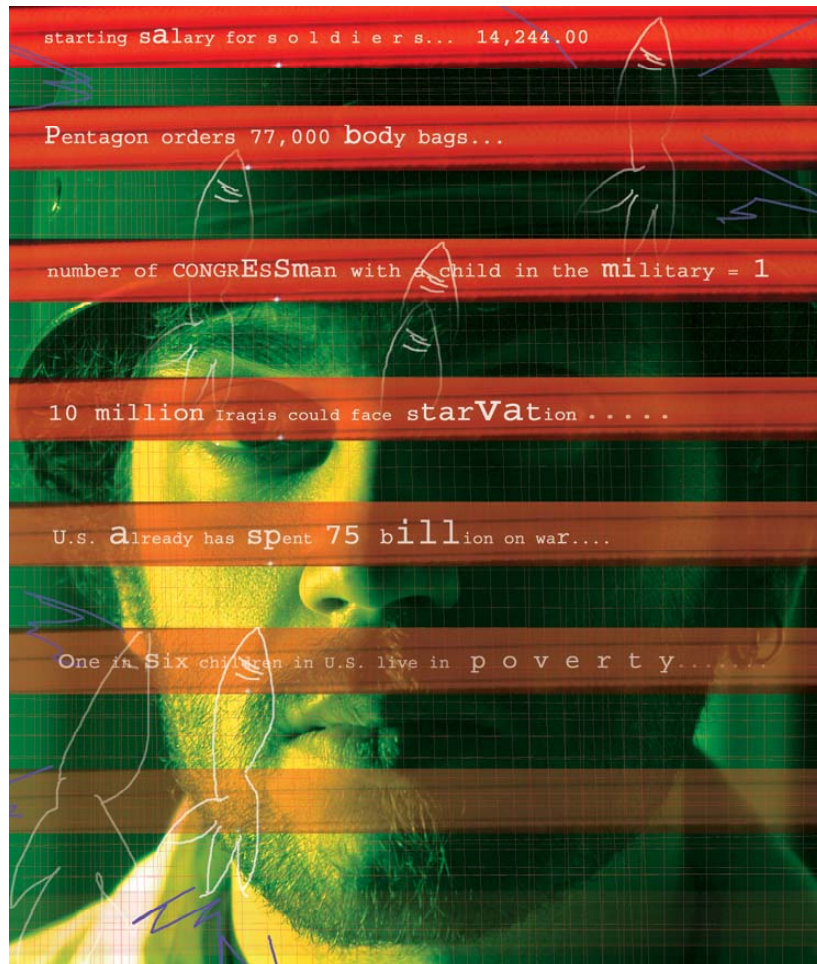
I am attracted to the work of Barbara Kruger, who targets the viewer with issues such as: “feminism, Classicism, consumerism, and individual autonomy and desire.” The juxtaposition of type and color gives way for horizontal and vertical symmetry with the type being what carries the eye around the composition. She is known for her found objects and altered images from popular culture, including photo archives, newspapers, and television. Using these media types allows her to challenge the notion that photographs tell an objective truth. Inserting typed phrases change the original message. One of Kruger’s most well known works, “Untitled (Your Body Is A Battleground)”, features a model’s face divided into sections. From left to right the image changes from positive to negative and is divided into thirds by type reading. “Your Body, Is A, Battleground.”

The piece focuses on the symmetrical standard of beauty and how advertising and the media perpetuate it. “Making art is about your experience of the world, transforming

⁴ Meggs, Philip B., Type & Image (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1989) 117.

the flow of moments into something visual, textual, or musical. Art creates a kind of commentary.” –Barbara Kruger⁵

The work, “Hate Builds” 2003, has similarities to Kruger’s work of the 1980s. Kruger’s altered photographic images and type have strong elements of shape and color that present a message that challenges political moreés. “Hate Builds” is the artist’s tribute to Barbara Kruger in use of the design similarity or relationship. This work incorporates readable facts, photography, and illustration to create awareness, educate, and inspire the viewer to interpret the message. The arrangement of the type within horizontal bars across the photograph visually supports the concept that “Hate Builds”. The red bars, a photograph of a neon light, are used to create a sense of urgency and alert.



1. Hate Builds, 2003
36"x24", Photography/Computer Generated

My goal is to challenge contemporary society and politics the way the publication *Adbusters* focuses on excessive consumerism and over-saturation of media. The ultimate goal of *Adbusters* is to alert and remind us of the conflict created in our society from mindless indulgence. *Adbusters* wishes to deliver awareness to graphic designers of our time in hopes that they too will approach advertising with a new and thoughtful attitude. "We want to change the way information flows, the way institutions wield power, the way TV stations are run, the way the food, fashion, automobile, sports, music and culture

industries set their Can we stop the war against terror upon terror upon terror, without end? ”-*Adbusters Publication*⁶



Figure 2.
“Appetite”⁷

In the artwork, “Breathe,” I use the placement of type on an altered photograph to convey a message about the consequences of mass production and consumerism. The photograph of the factory was taken by me in the region where I live using a digital camera. The photograph was then altered and manipulated using the computer. The collage of photography, illustration, and type combined reinforces the notion that fine art

⁶: *Adbusters* – Culture Jammer Headquarters, 10/27/04, 8:23 pm, www.adbusters.org

⁷ As cited: “Appetite” November/December Cover of *Adbusters Publication*

can create awareness and send a message. The association of chemical stacks polluting the environment, while an appropriated carp image symbolically jumps out of water in front of the factory, provides a narrative for the viewer.



2. Breathe, 2004
35"x27", Photography/Computer Generated

“Breathe” is a tribute to Sue Coe. Coe is a politically oriented and inclined artist whose work promotes social and political change. Originally an illustrator for publications such as *The New York Times* and *Time Magazine*, Sue creates illustrated discourses on topics such as AIDS, labor and sweatshop conditions, war and economic interest of the petrochemical industry, animal rights, and the American meat industry.

She uses hand written type to help the viewer interpret the picture. In the drawing Coe did for the Lewis & Clark Law School, 2003, “They need a good lawyer,” Coe depicts with sad twisted humor the plight of animals in danger. The greyhound race dog with a nose muzzle hiding most of the animal’s nose has been used and discarded at the local dog track. The eyes hold sadness. Coe makes a statement about the production of pork in this country with the pig looking scared and leaning on the monkey who is smoked, sent into space, and given every cancer treatment drug known to man. The work speaks for itself.

In “Breathe,” I try to show the plight of the environment through the sad, gasping carp in a similar way as the sad depiction of Coe’s drawings. In Coe’s work the words are usually handwritten. In contrast, I use computer-generated fonts and sometimes manipulate the height and width of each letter or word to support the purpose of the design.

Sue Coe creates an impression in the viewer’s mind and eye by taking a grim issue and delivering it in an uncensored light. Coe’s exceptional talent allows her to create works that impress and disgust. Her ability to create high quality pieces while using different media is also quite impressive. Sue Coe has certainly shown herself to be a remarkable social protest artist.

CHAPTER 3

IMAGE

Image: a visual form of communication using photography, digital information, illustration, transparency, and other forms of alterations.⁸

My connection to photography began with graduate school. I began to layer negatives to achieve a different result in photography, which I would later carry into my computer-generated images. After September 11th, my work changed. I began to move away from abstraction toward a more meaningful mission, social protest. I constructed five missiles for the purpose of photographing as graphic image. In studio photography, I learned about lighting techniques as well as filters, backdrops, strobes, and using a digital camera. With these tools I began to push my experimentation further using the computer. My body of work on social protest began to take form. I began to show my personal opinions on current events, one of which being the war in Iraq.

My work was now in full swing to speak a message of social protest and unrest. I looked to the intellectual skeleton of our society, or lack thereof. Our society has a twisted way of looking at things that have happened to us collectively as a country. So this becomes my message: To make individuals aware of opinions and truths that the average, hardworking citizen does not have time to consider or ponder. My artwork will bear a voice of truth and hope to educate and create awareness while allowing the viewer to form his or her own opinion and make his or her own choice about the art and about their own lives.

In the artwork, “War Kills,” 2003, I give the missiles a subliminal look and the appeal of mystery and beauty. At first glance, they are unrecognizable as missiles, but

⁸ Author’s definition of image

this mystery draws the viewer to take a closer look. The missiles look as if they may be setting in a smoked filled area. There is a cloud-like image of what anthrax looks like under a microscope, which is to the right of the missiles. Other squares of microscopic germ warfare are lined along the bottom, with the last one bearing a transparent head under a gas mask and the small words, “War Kills.” When the viewer realizes the artwork is about missiles and germ warfare, the picture doesn’t hold the same “beautiful” quality as at first look. My hope is that one will think of the fragility of life when one considers war.

“T.V. George” is a combination of digital photography, old and new photographs, and other found objects and illustration. The look of an old photograph with remnants of the past sometimes appears as something new. Old does become new when history repeats itself. Barbara Kruger did many works with old photographs from newspaper archives, libraries, and many other sources.⁹ “T.V.George” has a similar quality with the initial look as if the viewer is seeing some of the past combined with news of the present to create a work of art that draws attention to this nation’s insatiable appetite for fossil fuel.

⁹ Goodeve, Thyra N., “The Art of Public Address,” Art in America Nov. 1997: 93-99.

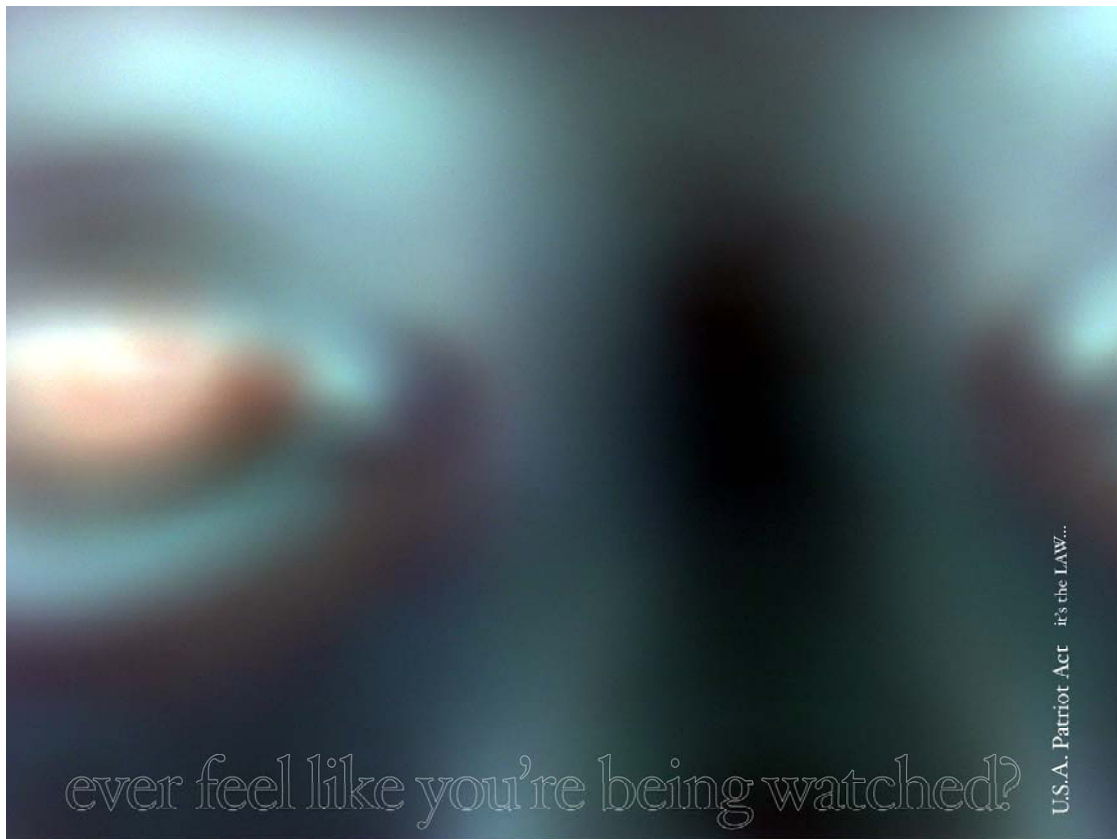


3. War Kills, 2003
35"x23", Photography/Computer Generated



4. TV George, 2004
34"x24", Photography/Computer Generated

Visual imagery, when strong enough, can stand alone to convey a message. We see it in our society everyday. However, a fine line can be drawn between the effective use of image alone and the need for accompanying type. In the work, "Watchful Eye", the photograph itself carries a mysterious look. But, when paired with the phrase, "Ever feel like you're being watched," it gives an intimidating feeling of violation, when our lives are no longer private. The image and the type in this piece go hand-in-hand: without both, part of the message would be lost.



5. Watchful Eyes, 2004
24"x25", Photography/Computer Generated

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

“Our United States history has a consistent record of social protest. From the Boston Tea Party to Harper’s Ferry to Seneca Falls, our country has been built on the struggle for freedom of speech and assembly and by the brave ones who fought for a variety of social issues. The right to govern themselves, slavery, discrimination, racism, and sexism has kept Americans involved in the battle for equality.”¹⁰ But social protest was happening in other parts of the world long before America and the cries for social justice.

In the *Garden of Earthly Delights*, Hieronymus Bosch was reminding everyone of their social moreés and the consequences of sin to the soul. Painted on oak panels, Bosch depicts a world of fantasy, beauty, and the results of bad behavior. Animals are seen as interacting with all humans. The color and beauty of each person, animal, or plant has a bright, animative quality. The adults seem more like children. This is one of the first accounts of social commentary and protest and is considered to be a crucial point in the development of social and political protest.

In 1808 Goya was 62 years old, a respected and wealthy court painter whose work had ranged from gay tapestry designs to perceptive portraits, stunning murals and powerful etchings. Deaf and growing old, Goya had no reason to believe that some of his most original work was still before him. But political intrigue precipitated on Spain a cruel and unnecessary war, a war that was to present Goya with the backdrop for the work whose vivid truth would help secure him as one of the world’s great artists.¹¹

<http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/njh/1960/1960HOME.htm>¹⁰

¹¹ Schickel, Richard, Time Life Books, *The World of Goya 1746-1828*, (New York: Time, 1968) 128.

A Spanish uprising led six Spaniards, believed to be connected to the event, to their death. The six were never tried. Six years later Goya would paint an account of the execution. The executioners are anonymous soldiers obeying orders. The focus of the painting is a peasant with arms upraised with a look of horror and resignation. He knows he faces death. Today this piece is a fine example of social and political commentary. It is unknown whether Goya painted this event from something, such as a newspaper reference, or if word-of-mouth inspired his talent, but based on the strong emotions present in his painting, it almost seems as if he witnessed the entire event first-hand.

I have paired type and image to visually create works of art that send a message, create awareness, and may change opinions and minds of the viewer. Social Protest has been rearing its mighty fist long before civil rights, Vietnam, or the present war in Iraq. Art ultimately tells the history of the world. From Bosch, to Goya, to the *Adbusters* publication today, these artists, along with myself are trying to change the world, through our art that stands as our voice. My work is a narrative of our time and my opinions. I will continue to create works of art that reflect the social injustice, protest, and ideas that concern me politically and socially. I will strive to push my experimentation even further as I build images and refine my process, with the end result being, my voice.

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- Adbusters* – Culture Jammer Headquarters, www.adbusters.org
- Social Protest in the 1960's and 1970's,
<http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/njh/1960/1960HOME.htm>

VITA

Wendy Ricker Blair

419 W Pine Street
Johnson City, Tennessee 37604

Education:

B.F.A. Bachelor of Fine Art, concentration in sculpture.

M.F.A. Master of Fine Art, concentration in graphic design and studio photography.
December 2004.

Awards:

'Addy Award', January 2004. Award recognized the photography of *The Mockingbird*, a publication by the English & Art Departments of East Tennessee State University. Publication includes literature and art selected by a committee of Professors from both departments. I was recognized for the photography of the art work for the publication.

Experience:

April 2004

Bristol Virginia High School, Bristol, VA. Commissioned mosaic wall that is twelve feet by fifteen feet that is in the foyer of the school. Wall depicts the beauty of southwest Virginia and includes native plants and trees.

August 2003

Design of catalog for Stone Cutters, a company that wholesales hand carved fountains and pottery from Mexico. Catalog includes twenty five photographs and information about the company.

August 2003

Plus Mark/American Greetings, Inc., Afton, TN. Organization of art work for cards and gift wrapping paper. Engraving was then completed on a 'Zed engraver for plates to do line production printing from.

June 2003

Unicoi County Chamber of Commerce, Erwin, TN. Designed and permanently installed seven mosaic benches and twenty four stepping stones for the city park 'walking trail' that runs in front of the Nolichucky river.

Benches and stones represent the beauty of East Tennessee's plant life.

May 2003

Indian Trail Middle School, Johnson City, TN. Created three out door sculptures with students that are permanently located on school grounds.

The sculptures represent the students version of the earth, moon, and sun.

March 2003

Filmed conference for I.D.E.A., Individuals with Disabilities for Education Awareness. Wayne and Barabara Dyer were guest host. I filmed parts of the conference from guest speakers to the dinner/banquet.

March 2003

Little Milligan School, Butler, TN. Arts Building Communities Grant. Grant is provided through the Tennessee Arts Commission. I helped students design and mosaic wall that depicts Watauga Lake and history behind the lake. Seventh and eighth grade students participated.

January 2003

Doe Elementary School, Mountain City, TN. Worked with all grades (1-5) to create a mosaic bench for the foyer of the school. Also created twenty four stepping stones for the school grounds.

May 2002

Indian Trail Middle School, Johnson City, TN. *Mosaic Garden Wall*. Designed and worked with sixth and seventh grade students to create a three panel mosaic wall depicting the natural beauty of this region. We also created thirty-nine stepping stones and two mosaic benches that are in a garden area on the school grounds.

August – May 2001-2002

Art Teacher. Little Milligan School, Butler, TN. Grant provided by the Tennessee Arts Commission for rural schools without art. (k-8) Children learned a variety of art from clay techniques to outdoor sculpture.

May 2000.

Indian Trail Middle School, Johnson City, TN. Students worked to create two outdoor mosaic benches that are permanently installed on the art plaza of the school grounds.

August 2000

Johnson City Area Arts Council, Johnson City, TN. Summer art enrichment program that include students ages seven through twelve. Created mosaic benches that we installed at the Johnson City Area Arts Council.

October 1999

Indian Trail Middle School, Johnson City, TN. Lecturer and presenter of artist work to students.

June-July 1999

Artist/Instructor. *Art Across the Ages*. An intergenerational art program that teamed senior citizens with elementary aged students, to create a permanent sculpture placed on the grounds of Fairmont Elementary. Sculpture resemble a sunflower with an inchworm

and snail sitting on the plant. Funding provided by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, Community Partnership for Cultural Participation Initiative, East Tennessee Foundation, and the Johnson City Seniors Foundation.

June 1999

Art Director/Instructor. Omni Vision, Inc. Organized and coordinated staff to provide art instruction for 108 children at risk. Ages five through sixteen.

Photography, out door sculpture, clay bead making and fiber art were some of the featured projects.

April 1999

Artist/designer. Sherrod Library, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee. Designed and carved three outdoor benches for the plaza of the new Sherrod Library. Grant provided by East Tennessee State University.

June 1998

Limestone Carving Symposium. One week hands on experience provided by Bybee Stone Company and the Bloomington Arts Council, Bloomington, IN.

June/July 1998

Art Instructor/Coordinator. *The Road Company* touring theatrical troupe. After school sculpture enrichment program for a neighborhood of low-income families. Classes were centered on sculpture, art history, and the importance of art in the community. Johnson City, Tennessee.

September/April 1997-98

Art Instructor/Coordinator. *The Road Company* touring theatrical troupe. After school sculpture enrichment program for low income neighborhoods. Classes centered on painting and sculpture.

April 1997

Artist. Community art project for Mountain View Elementary School, Johnson City, Tennessee. Collaborative work on large scale Ferro cement and mosaic turtle.

January/April 1997

Artist Instructor/Coordinator. *Art Buddies*, sponsored by East Tennessee State University, Department of Art & Design and Intermedia Arts of East Tennessee. Ages seven through fifteen. Students were introduced to oil painting, sculpture, and art history.